

**Press Release: *The Vanishing Shrub-steppe* video new release**

A partnership between Seattle video producer, Thomas Ager, and Wenatchee's B.L.M. wildlife biologist, Neal Hedges, has resulted in the production of a new educational documentary video program that celebrates central Washington's fascinating landscape. *The Vanishing Shrub-Steppe* (20-minutes) takes us on a journey of sights and sounds, exploring the wide variety of plants and animals that thrive in the rugged and diverse landscape of Washington state's Columbia Basin. Videos can be invoiced and purchased for \$7.00 (+ postage) by contacting the Wenatchee B.L.M. office (509-665-2100). A free resource packet designed for educators is available upon request. Included are a lesson plan and viewing guide for the video, the BLM color poster, *The Channeled Scablands*, a magazine, *Birds in the Sagebrush Sea*, and a bibliography of shrub-steppe resources specific to Washington.

*The Vanishing Shrub-steppe* is a vivid visual tapestry filled with striking coulees, blooming wildflowers, towering black rock cliffs, sagebrush covered hills, and unexpected pools of water. This mosaic of habitats comprises the shrub-steppe eco-region, dominated by sagebrush and bunchgrasses. For much of the video program, the narrator is silent, beckoning the viewer to enter this landscape of solitude. A symphony of bird songs and close-up views of wildlife lead us on an exploration of hidden canyons, splashing waterfalls, wet marshes, and rock talus slopes. Occasional glimpses of jet trails, farm machinery, old cemeteries and telephone lines reminds us of our collective history in the landscape. Following the end credits, viewers who want to learn more are shown six regional publications and over 50 of the animals and plants seen in the film are identified by name.

The shrub-steppe landscape supports a tremendous number of different species: over 100 birds, 70 mammals, >500 plants, and a host of amphibians, reptiles, insect, and other life forms. Yet, 150 years of human activities have reduced what was once 12 million continuous acres to small fragments of habitat. Near the end of the video, we meet four "shrub-steppe obligate" species in spectacular close-up views: Western sage grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, Washington ground squirrel, and pygmy rabbit. Through graphs, sound clips from regional news, and newspaper headlines, we examine their declining numbers in light of habitat reduction. The viewer is presented with a mission: "to protect and nurture what remains, we must train our perceptions to see the treasures and listen to the secrets of the shrub-steppe world. Together, we can save this gift from the past...this sacred trust for the future."

Thomas Ager speaks eloquently about his passion for this rugged landscape. "One of the great joys of bird-watching and video/photo as a tandem is that you are always on a treasure hunt. The treasure you bring home, of course, is the photo or recording. And because you never know what the next exact moment will bring, you always have to be vigilant. Most of the time, I spend long, long hours simply standing with the camera, in the middle of riparian habitat or sagebrush or a along a creek. Like the Native Americans hunters of old, I trust the creatures to come to me rather than flitting around chasing them. I try to melt into the landscape and become invisible that way. Draped over the camera like that, my legs fall asleep, my arms and hands fall asleep and the mosquitoes have me for lunch; it's often freezing or sweltering. And yet, it is never boring. It becomes apparent how little really pristine habitat there is remaining, especially in the shrub-steppe. And it gives my efforts out there a very palpable kind of urgency."

Contact information (for credit card sales, invoices, or checks)

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